

# The status of (*Cursorius temminckii*) *damarensis* Reichenow, 1901

by P. A. Clancey

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In the first volume of his monumental work on Afrotropical birds, Reichenow (1901) conditionally named a Damaraland, South West Africa/Namibia, race of Temminck's Courser *Cursorius temminckii* Swainson as follows: "With Damara birds the reddish brown of the crown seems to be paler. These [birds] may be separable as a subspecies *damarensis*." No type-specimen was designated with the rudimentary description and none appears to exist, so that the taxonomic attribution of the name must rest explicitly on the crown colour character. As demonstrated in the recent study of geographical variation in *C. t. temminckii* (Clancey 1984), all 3 subspecies occur in South West Africa, these being *C. t. temminckii* Swainson, 1822: Senegal, with the crown pale Sudan Brown (*vide* Ridgway 1912), as a relatively common non-breeding visitor, *C. t. ruwanensis* Madarász, 1915: Ruwana R., Speke Gulf, southeastern L. Victoria, Mara district, Tanzania, with a darker crown (Amber Brown), breeding on the alluvial flats of the Okavango R. flood-plain of the north-east of the territory, and *C. t. damarensis* Reichenow 1901: no locality, but Damaraland by inference, again with a paler crown (dusty or dull Sudan Brown). In my revision of 1984, *C. t. damarensis* was shown to be centred as a breeder on the saline pans of Botswana, but occurring to the west of this to the Etosha Pan in northern South West Africa/Namibia in small numbers.

Examination of the short series of 7 South West African specimens in the collection of the State Museum, Windhoek in May 1988, revealed that all are attributable to the nominate race, which is a long-distance transequatorial post-breeding migrant from the Sahel and Guinean savannas to the south of the Sahara; these were collected in the Etosha Pan area (19 February), Wilhelmsrute, Gobabis (13 February), Welbacht (? = Welbedacht) (17 March) and the Waterberg (17 November). Neither *ruwanensis* nor *damarensis* is represented in the collection in Windhoek. The paler crown character given for *damarensis* by Reichenow negates it being an earlier name for *ruwanensis*, restricting application to either nominate *temminckii* as a junior synonym or as the definitive name for the saline pan oriented form, as currently interpreted. In the latter event, as Reichenow did not comment to the effect that the back and wings were distinctly paler (in the saline pan phenotype Drab or Light Drab, *v.* Tawny-Olive in *C. t. temminckii*), indications are that his *damarensis* was based on a comparison between migrant nominate *temminckii* taken or observed in northern South West Africa/Namibia and *ruwanensis* from German East Africa. It is noteworthy that the only South West African locality given in Reichenow's 1901 treatment of the present courser is Ondangua, in Ovamboland, which is based on a C. J. Andersson reference of the mid-1800s. As we have no recourse to a

comparison of a type-specimen to resolve this issue, I recommend on the basis of: (a) the stated lighter coloured crown, and (b) the absence of a reference to a more drab-coloured dorsum, that (*C. t.*) *damarensis* be treated as a synonym of nominate *C. temminckii*, an established non-breeding visitor to South West Africa/Namibia from north of the Equator. Resulting from this action, a name is required for the "*damarensis*" of Peters (1934), Clancey (1984) and other authors:

***Cursorius temminckii aridus*, subsp. nov.**

*Type.* ♂, adult. Sekhuma Pan, 160 km W. of Kanye, southern Botswana. Taken on 18 February 1961. Collector's No. SWK 118 (name not given). In the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, Mus. Reg. No. 45822.

*Description.* Compared with *C. t. ruvanensis* crown paler, being a dull Sudan Brown, and dorsum and wings lighter and greyer, less dark earthen, brown, corresponding to the Drab or Light Drab of Ridgway (1912). Over the lateral head, the cheeks are less washed with light rusty buff, and ventrally the fore-throat is whiter and the breast paler (about Pinkish Buff). The Cinnamon of the mid-breast is both lighter and more restricted, and the black mid-ventral patch is smaller with a corresponding increase in the extent of the lateral white. Similar in size.

The nominate race differs from *aridus* in having a richer Sudan Brown crown, the dorsum and wings warm Tawny-Olive rather than Drab, the lateral head and fore-throat washed with tawny, and with the breast Cinnamon-Buff *v.* Pinkish Buff, the lower mid-breast more strongly tinged Cinnamon. The black belly patch is also broader.

*Measurements.* Wings of 6 ♂♂, 126–132 (126.6), of 7 ♀♀, 120–128 (124.4) mm.

*Material examined.* *C. t. aridus*, 14; *C. t. temminckii*, 77; *C. t. ruvanensis*, 141.

*Range.* Occurs from the Etosha National Park, northern South West Africa/Namibia, locally east to the saline pans of Botswana south of the Ngamiland swamps and from Makgadikgadi Pan southwards through the Kalahari and regions to the east to the Molopo R. It extends marginally into western Zimbabwe at Hwange (Wankie) National Park and near Bulawayo. Resident, but one taken at Musimbiri, Sabi/Lundi confluence, in southeastern Zimbabwe, on 17 January suggests local seasonal nomadism

*Etymology.* *aridus*, Latin, parched or desiccated.

*Remarks.* The above description is based on Clancey (1984: 371–372).

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## The systematic position of the Buff-streaked Chat (*Oenanthe/Saxicola bifasciata*)

by Alan Tye

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The Buff-streaked Chat is an enigmatic species, endemic to southern Africa. It was considered by Hall & Moreau (1970) as of "uncertain affinities". At its original description, Temminck (1829) named it *Saxicola bifasciata*, thus placing it in a genus which at that time covered a variety of chats, including most wheatears. It was later transferred to the ant-chat genus *Myrmecocichla* (e.g. Seebohm 1881) while other wheatears remained in *Saxicola*. However, at that time *Myrmecocichla* bore little resemblance to the genus as we now know it: Seebohm (1881) considered it to comprise 8 species in 3 groups, of which 6 species (2 groups) are now included in *Cercomela*. (The remainder of present-day *Cercomela* was included with the wheatears in *Saxicola*.) The third group in Seebohm's *Myrmecocichla* comprised the Buff-streaked Chat and the Southern Anteater Chat *M. formicivora*.

The very diverse *Myrmecocichla* as constituted by Seebohm (1881) was later dismantled, with the majority of its species transferred to *Cercomela* but, over the years, further species were added to it, forming a *Myrmecocichla* genus quite different in character from that in which Seebohm placed the Buff-streaked Chat.

The Buff-streaked Chat superficially resembles some of the ant-chats in having white (or buff) shoulders, but this mark is due to buff scapulars in the Buff-streaked Chat while in the ant-chats it is a result of white wing-coverts. In other characteristics, the Buff-streaked Chat differs from the ant-chats in plumage, egg-colour and behaviour and does not appear to be closely related to them. Ripley (1962) removed it and restored it to the wheatears (which by that time were placed in *Oenanthe*) "on plumage and behavioural grounds" but without giving detailed reasons.

In plumage, the Buff-streaked Chat is actually quite unlike any wheatear, although it does bear a striking resemblance to the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and Whinchat *S. rubetra*. It seems worthwhile to compare in detail what is known of the plumage, morphology, behaviour and ecology of the Buff-streaked Chat with 'other' wheatears (hereafter termed simply wheatears or *Oenanthe* spp.) and with *Saxicola* spp.